

## **200 Years of Socialism: Revisiting the Old Dilemmas**

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### **Militant capitalism, bad infinity, and the longing for total revolution**

**Dilip Simeon**

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**Abstract:** The Bolshevik confiscation of the Russian revolution was indeed a 'bifurcation point', but it was the French revolution that launched the age of ideology, millenarian doctrines and annihilationist warfare. If the 'bad infinity' of capital accumulation was accompanied by an economic theology; the subjugation of the labour movement by vanguardist doctrines represented another bad infinity: the 'end of history.' The bourgeois enlightenment was attacked from two sides, signified symbolically by Marx and Nietzsche. By taking up residence in an eternal waiting room; the labour movement was tied to an authoritarian politics which replaced philosophy with sophistry and infused real possibilities with ideological phantasms. Meanwhile the capitalist system launched its own revolution.

1/ *Socialism and nationalism are the two great millstones between which progress pulverizes what is left of the old world, and eventually itself*: Ernst Junger; Total Mobilisation; 1930

2/ *For what is most terrible in it is the mixture of truth and falsehood*: Nikolai Berdyaev; *The Religion of Communism*; 1931

3/ *We have got to admit that if Fascism is everywhere advancing, this is largely the fault of Socialists themselves. Partly it is due to the mistaken Communist tactic of sabotaging democracy, i.e., sawing off the branch you are sitting on; but still more to the fact that Socialists have, so to speak, presented their case wrong side foremost. They have never made it sufficiently clear that the essential aims of Socialism are justice and liberty. With their eyes glued to economic facts, they have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly they have set up the goal of a materialistic Utopia. As a result, Fascism has been able to play upon every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of 'progress.'* George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937; Chapter 12

4/ *We live in very remarkable times. We find with astonishment that progress has concluded an alliance with barbarism.* Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*; 1938; Preface to Part 3

5/ *When the pride of the scientific revolutionary is diluted by time, the result is sadness, anxiety, and nausea: the last emotions of a decadent enlightenment.* Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism*

## **A/ Militant capitalism:**

**NB:** The keynote speaker uses the term *bifurcation points*. To my mind, these are the most significant points since 1789: 1791-3; 1848; 1917-18; 1932; 1945-9; 1968; and 1980-89.

A. 1/ Capitalism has always been military and militant. Marx gave war a determining place in the evolution of capitalist modernity:

*Notabene* in regard to points to be mentioned here and not forgotten: (1) War developed much earlier than peace; the way in which certain economic relations such as wage-labour, machinery etc. develop earlier, owing to war and in the armies etc., than in the interior of bourgeois society. The relation of productive forces and relations of production also especially vivid in the army': Marx; *Grundrisse* p. 109

Robert Kurz has argued the case for the destructive origins of capitalism. The development of deadly weaponry plus the 'military revolution' in 16th century Europe must be related to European colonial expansion as well (Alfred McCoy). *Militancy* refers to ideology. Ernst Fraenkel used the term *militant capitalism* in his legal history of the Dual State (1937-39)

many people find the arbitrary rule of the Third Reich unbearable. These same people acknowledge, however, that the idea of "community," as there understood, is something truly great. Those who take up this ambivalent attitude toward National-Socialism suffer from two principal misconceptions:

1. The present German ideology of *Gemeinschaft* (community) is nothing but a mask hiding the still existing capitalistic structure of society. 2. The ideological mask (the community)

equally hides the Prerogative State [Fraenkel distinguishes the “normal,” so-called Normative State providing chiefly for civil law and the quasi-totalitarian Party state subordinated to the *Führerprinzip*] operating by arbitrary measures.

The replacement of the *Rechtsstaat* (Legal State) by the Dual State is but a symptom. The root of evil lies at the exact point where the uncritical opponents of National-Socialism discover grounds for admiration, namely in the community ideology and in the **militant capitalism** (emphasis added) which this very notion of the *Gemeinschaft* is supposed to hide. It is indeed for the maintenance of capitalism in Germany that the authoritarian Dual State is necessary. Ernst Fraenkel (1941), p 153.

A. 2/ The second insight may be gained from Elie Halevy (1929); where he argued that the world war had increased national control over individual activities and opened the way for de-facto socialism. War-time nationalization rather than Marxism was the source of post war socialism. New organizations of constraint were replacing the old ones.

The age of tyrannies dates from the month of August, 1914, that is to say from the time when the belligerent nations first adopted a form of social organisation which may be defined as follows: (a) In the economic sphere, the nationalisation, on a vast scale, of all the means of production, distribution and exchange; and at the same time an appeal by the Governments to the leaders of the trade unions for support in carrying out this policy. State Socialism, therefore, is combined with syndicalist and "corporative" elements. (b) In the intellectual sphere, the "nationalisation of ideas" in two different forms, one negative, that is to say the suppression of all expressions of opinion which were thought to be opposed to the national interest, and the other positive. I shall call the positive aspect **the organisation of enthusiasm**. (Emphasis mine)

Post-war Socialism derives much more from this war-time organisation far more than from Marxist doctrine. The paradox of post-war socialism is that its recruits often come to it out of out of hatred and disgust for war, while it offers them a programme consisting in the prolongation of the war-time regime in time of peace... Russian Bolshevism displayed these characteristics. Arising out of a revolt against the war, the Russian Revolution was consolidated and organized in the form of 'wartime communism' during the two years of fighting with the Allied Armies....

Here a new characteristic is added to those we have mentioned above. Because of the anarchical collapse, because of the complete disappearance of the state, a group of armed men, moved by a common faith, decreed that they were the state: in this form, Bolshevism is, literally, a 'fascism.' Elie Halevy, p 205-6.

(NB: In my 2017 essay on Bolshevism, I argue that Lenin was the twentieth century's first decisionist politician. *Decisionism* celebrates the opportune, and subordinates truth to the quest for power. Carl Schmitt admired Lenin and Mussolini for their 'democratic' politics. I will add that the overthrow of Tsarism in March 1917 was explicable more in terms of Gustave Herve's doctrine of a combined worker/ soldier strike against war; than in terms of Lenin's ideas. Lenin was suspicious of the soviets from 1905 to 1921. The word was taken over, the content destroyed).

A. 3/ In the age of high imperialism, militarism conjoined with ideological claims about the spread of civilization, Christianity, and the benefits of free trade. Nostalgia for imperial glory; the manipulation of memory (ancient Greece, New Medina, Great White America, China's Middle Kingdom, the Russian imperium, etc.), are examples of this rhetoric. India's

ruling establishment is currently engaged in warfare with the Mughal Empire. These modes of thought exemplify Carl Schmitt's metaphysics of animosity. The last imperial war (1931-45; refer Richard Overly) was an extension of this. After the victory of the Allied powers – with the enormous role of the Red Army - US imperialism continued to export 'democracy' to Iran, Vietnam, Chile, Iraq, Afghanistan etc. This deceitful enterprise was enabled by the totalitarian nature of the communist imperium.

A. 4/ Capitalism is indirect rule, the re-presentation of the sovereignty of the people as the [sovereignty of money](#) transmuted into capital. The manipulation of the human mind becomes crucial. Militant capitalism is tyranny represented ideologically – ideocracy. Popular discontent is sought to be discharged in an ethos of nostalgic militarism, and since *differance* is now celebrated as wisdom, populist rhetoric appears in variegated guises. Always however, these guises are fighting the everlasting good fight to rectify history.

## **B/ Bad infinity:**

B. 1/ In prevalent opinion regarding economic rationality and political virtue, the Good is realized only in a progression extending to infinity, rather than something always already present. The Great Beyond is repositioned as the Bright Future. This futural comportment towards time denudes the present of reality, and even of presence. (It also points to the influence of Heideggerian existentialism upon a swathe of leftist doctrine). It underpins public opinion; and indicates the tendency of the capitalist system to abolish both history and politics. History is abolished because nothing significant may be expected except more of the same; politics are abolished because all issues are cast in a mould of eternal conflict. In Orwell's words, by becoming continuous, war has ceased to exist.

It is not philosophy, but Nietzsche's postulate of eternal recurrence which is realized.

B. 2/ Capitalism offers no solution to social and ecological catastrophe other than propaganda. All economic problems are proposed to be resolved by more growth, accumulation, deregulation. If all this leads to social annihilation, so be it. There is much ado, but about nothing. Nihilism no longer stands at the door, as in Nietzsche's famous aphorism but has entered the house.

B. 3/ The erosion or disappearance of standards of truth, justice, and moral judgment manifests ideological implosion, something presaged in Ernst Junger's observation that *Socialism and nationalism are the two great millstones between which progress pulverizes what is left of the old world, and eventually itself*.

B. 4/ Marxism-Leninism is self-perficient nihilism, that is, immanently driven towards implosion. Peter Axelrod defined Bolshevism as 'an organizational utopia of a theocratic character' (Andrzej Walicki, p 310). For the Kronstadt sailors too, the "moral servitude" imposed by Bolshevism was the most repugnant feature of the new dictatorship (ibid).

As revolutionary ideology, Leninism was rooted in great part in the ethical nihilism of Sergei Nechaev (1847-1882) and the organizational elitism of Pyotr Tkachev (1844 – 1886), whose pamphlet *The Tasks of Revolutionary Propaganda in Russia* (1874) was a precursor to Lenin's *What is to be Done?* (Refer Part Two of Tibor Szamuely). He was hailed as the first Russian Marxist in the early years of the Bolshevik regime, but disowned by the

mid 1920's. Nechaev's ruthless utilitarian morality made it necessary to condemn him as an intriguer, perhaps because of the proximity of his nihilism to that of Lenin. The monolithic theoretical claims of Marxism Leninism took precedence over truthful historiography.

(After the repression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921, Victor Serge was the first communist to describe Bolshevism as *totalitarian*: refer *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*; 2002).

In its inner dynamic, Bolshevism replicated the capitalist bad infinity: it seized power in the name of the soviets, and demolished them to perpetuate its dictatorship; it sought legitimacy in cosmological assertions (dialectics of nature, laws of History etc.); and promulgated the doctrine of the Party as sole repository of 'historical' truth. Truth in politics was conceived in terms of ideology, divested of all autonomy: reduced to historical context; and reflective of nothing other than the interest of a class (refer Jeffrey Barash). Marx and his followers had reduced truth to a political function.

The perspectival approach renders rational speech impossible, because all theory is interpretation, and all interpretation is relative to the standpoint of the observer. Intelligible speech is replaced by unending and pointless garrulity. Alexander Zinoviev's book about nonentities, *The Madhouse*, is a brutal deconstruction of this phenomenon.

### **C/ The longing for total revolution:**

C. 1/ Yearning for social transformation has been present in many historical periods. The modern form is marked by philosophical discontent and the idea of total revolution (refer Bernard Yack, Introduction). The term *revolution* itself underwent a semantic change, acquiring a rectilinear orientation toward the future, in place of the circular one that implied a return to a previous state of virtue. Yack's argument is summarised as follows:

We should not judge humanity, it is said, by the characteristics of individuals living under modern conditions. They do not represent the full measure of humanity. Only if we escape the iron cage of modern society, only if we get beyond the spirit in which modern man thinks, lives, and relates to others, will we know men who are fully human.

This complaint is one of the most frequently repeated refrains in the discourse of modern intellectuals. We can hear it both on the radical left and right, among those who measure humanity by egalitarian and inegalitarian standards, among those who long for the overcoming of social injustice, of cultural philistinism, or of human weakness. It is raised by, among others, Marx and Nietzsche, is echoed by their philosophic heirs from Marcuse to Heidegger, and resonates, less clearly, among... intellectuals and artists they have influenced. There is great disagreement about the specifically human characteristic that modern society dehumanizes - labour, the capacity for self-overcoming, our closeness to Being - as there is about what defines the spirit of modern society - the mode of production, moral values, culture, race. But all who make this complaint express at least two basic attitudes which define their shared state of mind: modern man is not fully human, and to become human man must get beyond the debilitating spirit of modern social interaction. Despite the bitter disagreements among them, this state of mind... is... shared by Rousseau, Schiller, the young Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and most of their twentieth-century disciples.

I shall try to identify and account for the characteristics of this new form of social discontent in terms of its philosophic sources... the concepts that make possible the designation of the dehumanizing spirit of modern society as the obstacle to a world without social sources of dissatisfaction (Bernard Yack, p 8)

Whereas complaints about inhuman practices are commonplace; there is distinction between this vocabulary and the claim that our very humanity has been uprooted by modern institutions. The insistence that this dehumanizing spirit of modern institutions is the central obstacle to our satisfaction carries two implications: firstly, that the term *human* is now being applied to distinctions *among* human beings, rather than that which marks the difference between humans and animals; a species characteristic. We are asked to believe that becoming human is an achievement.

The second implication is the positing of something called 'the spirit of the age,' the latter constituting a philosophical obstacle to human freedom and satisfaction. The general spirit of social interaction perverts all relationships, making the achievement of a "human" life through individual excellence impossible. And it was the exercise of freedom that supplied the distinction between those who had attained human stature and those who merely followed their natural impulses. The immanent tension in this approach is described by Yack as follows:

The same eighteenth century thinkers who used the concept of human nature as a weapon against the tyranny of irrational and conventional privilege were rendering that concept meaningless through their empiricist analyses of human behaviour. What is human nature if nature itself, let alone human convention, produces infinite variations in the life and character of men? The studies of the variations in behaviour produced by climate and *moeurs*, so popular among the *philosophes*, brought into question the concept of a single, unified human nature that entitles man to special respect. Nevertheless, most of them continued to rely on that concept in their battles against conventional hierarchies. Rousseau and, even more decisively, Kant challenge this ambiguous understanding of man's humanity. Rousseau questions the identification of man's distinctive humanity with his nature. The natural condition, however desirable, is for him a *pre-human* condition. The socialization of man, notwithstanding the misery it has created, has changed the human creature "from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man." Purely natural inclinations, however much Rousseau longs for them, provide no guide to man's humanity, "for the impulse of appetite alone is slavery." The citizen gains his dignity by opposing natural inclination. Political education is a process of "denaturing." Rousseau thus opens up a dichotomy between humanity and nature which Kant reformulates and popularizes as a dichotomy between human freedom and natural necessity. By distinguishing between man's humanity and his natural inclinations in this way Kant can defend human dignity against sceptical attacks...

Kant's critical philosophy rescued the twin aims of Enlightenment philosophy: the advancement of scientific knowledge and the emancipation of man from arbitrary, conventional authority. At least so it seemed to his German heirs... His dichotomy between human freedom and natural necessity... forms the conceptual foundation upon which all of the most influential nineteenth century German moral philosophers and social critics, even those like Marx and Nietzsche who explicitly reject it, erect their positions. As a result, the

new understanding of man's humanity is an important part of their perspective on modern individuals and institutions (Bernard Yack, 21-22).

C. 2/ The dehumanizing spirit of the age can only be overcome by total revolution. The demand for such overcoming is manifest as longing for something not attainable in the lifetime of the subject; as distinct from desire, which aims at attainable things. Marx came to the universal mission of the proletariat via philosophy:

The criticism of religion disillusioned man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself... The *task of history*, therefore, once the *world beyond the truth* has disappeared, is to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms*. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.

As philosophy finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people, the emancipation of the *Germans* into *men* will be accomplished... The *emancipation of the German* is the *emancipation of man*.... The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality.' Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction pp 176; 187; CWMG vol 3.

C. 3/ Confronting idealism and religion; Marx introduced the assumptions that:

Philosophy has a 'task', which is to be 'at the service of history.' Medieval scholasticism made philosophy the handmaiden of theology; Marx puts it at the service of 'history,' which, imbued with teleological significance, now replaces the 'truth beyond this world'; with the human sun.

Philosophy demands 'realization' – possible only via the abolition of the proletariat. It is the worker's spiritual weapon; just as the workers are philosophy's material weapon. It is no longer the love of wisdom, but a historical doctrine; the fulfilment of which requires the abolition of the proletariat *as its task*.

This approach to the future severs human nature from the special dignity which Greek philosophy accorded to the human being; and secondly, posits the spirit of the age as a philosophical obstacle to human freedom and satisfaction.

This points us to Rousseau, who despised the commercial spirit of modern institutions and was the grandparent of Romanticism. The exit from the postulated state of nature is seen as a fall, a loss of natural spontaneity; but a loss which has not been compensated for by sociality or reason. Reason is itself historical and can generate new and dangerous needs, which dehumanize humans (Bernard Yack, p 20; Richard Velkley, p 37). '*Since Rousseau, the analysis of human experience in the humanities and social sciences has been mostly in terms of culture and history, not nature*' (Velkley; 31). We have arrived at the cult of the particular.

The 'realization of philosophy' is a tyrannical fantasy. If we were 'marching' toward such a future, we should have arrived there long ago. György Lukács took care of this conundrum:

The working class may not understand the political and cultural inhumanity that capitalism imposes on it, but "the unique element in its situation is that its surpassing of immediacy represents an *aspiration towards society in its totality*, regardless of whether this aspiration remains conscious or unconscious for the moment." Lukacs defines "authentic" proletarian consciousness in terms of the ability to explain the contemporary world and guide a revolution. That ability is possessed by those who look at the world from the perspective of Marx's understanding of history and humanity (for Lukacs, the Communist party). Bernard Yack, p 289.

The claim to be in possession of a god's eye view of 'History' – *notwithstanding the ignorance of the proletariat* - is a central feature of twentieth century communism; and a clue to its relentless despotism. The 'universal class' seems to have disappeared.

C. 4/ An important feature of philosophical thought relevant to our understanding of ideology is the appearance of an alternative modernity; something Marx conceptualized as feudal or aristocratic socialism. This is how Zeev Sternhell describes it:

The intellectual, cultural, and political movement associated with the revolt against the Enlightenment constituted not a counterrevolution but a different revolution. It was not a counter-modernity but a different modernity that came into being and that revolted against rationalism, the autonomy of the individual, and all that unites people: their condition as rational beings with natural rights. That second modernity was based on all that differentiates and divides people - history, culture, language - a political culture that denied reason either the capacity or the right to mold people's lives, saw religion as an essential foundation of society, and did not hesitate to call on the state to regulate social relationships or to intervene in the economy. According to its theorists, the splintering, fragmentation, and atomization of human existence arising from the destruction of the medieval world was the cause of the modern decadence (Zeev Sternhell, p 8).

The idea of an alternative modernity is significant: ideology always appears in hybrids and mixtures, which include dynamism and stasis; idealizations of progress along with the distaste for it; nostalgic romanticism along with the romanticism of mechanical civilization (refer Filippo Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto). Here are some manifestations of these habits of thought:

- the longing for homogeneity
- the ideal of a totally administered society; of the technical control of history
- the reduction of humans and nature to a 'resource' for 'glorious' projects
- the evocation of a Grand March of History
- justifications for permanent warfare
- the reduction of truth to an emanation of 'context'
- the replacement of thought by opinion
- the use of mass media for mind control
- the abolition of reality; the reduction of theory to interpretation
- the 'rectification' of the past
- lofty futurism; the experience of presence as transience



## D/ The truth we need to speak

D. 1/ The dialogic character of philosophy is transformed by the revolutionary longing of the taskmasters of History into the dream of the end of history as well as of philosophy. The People's Republic of Heaven is replaced by the ever-retreating Bright Future. Our dream world comprises 'the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow' (Nietzsche).

D. 2/ There has been no proletarian revolution; only working-class uprisings which were either crushed or which resulted in more or less significant reforms. (Refer my essay on Indian workers in 1938). There have been changes in the political orientation of states based upon alliances of the laboring poor, including peasants and middle classes; but all democratic movements involving workers have been populist.

It is precisely this popular character of such movements that produced the correspondence societies, debating clubs, councils of workers and soldiers, and education societies which connected democracy and freedom; and the remembrance of 1848 as 'the springtime of peoples.' One participant in the rebellion of May 1968 in Paris reported its most memorable feature: *everyone was talking*:

Eleanor Bakhtadze, who had been a student at Nanterre in 1968, said, "Paris was wonderful then. Everyone was talking." Ask anyone in Paris with fond memories of the spring of 1968, and that is what they will say: People talked. They talked at the barricades; they talked in the métro; when they occupied the Odéon theater it became the site of a round-the-clock orgy of French verbiage. Someone would stand up and start discussing the true nature of revolution or the merits of Bakuninism and how anarchism applied to Che Guevara. Others would refute the thesis at length. Students on the street found themselves in conversation with teachers and professors for the first time. Workers and students talked to one another. For the first time in this rigid, formal, nineteenth-century society, everyone was talking to everyone. "Talk to your neighbor" were words written on the walls. Radith Geismar, then the wife of Alain, said, "The real sense of '68 was a tremendous sense of liberation, of freedom, of people talking, talking on the street, in the universities, in theaters. It was much more than throwing stones... A whole system of order and authority and tradition was swept aside. Much of the freedom of today began in '68.' Mark Kurlansky, 2003; p 227

This loosening of minds and tongues was not demarcated by class, religion or ethnicity: it was a celebration of humanity. It is this spirit that ought to inspire socialists, not the desire to homogenize and control the human intellect.

D. 3/ Why were such movements crushed or taken over by professional revolutionaries committed to 'yet another version of the economic-administrative order and the principle of sovereignty: the return to domination'? (Robert Urquhart). Why did the economic theology of large-scale organization of production become omnipotent; and why did freedom – which always begins with the freedom of thought, speech and combination – become the first target of vanguardist revolutionaries?

D. 4/ There are no pure class politics; only populist politics oriented toward liberty; versus those which lean toward tyranny and conformism. The twentieth century has seen both, and the ideas associated with these movements are ideological mixtures.

D. 5/ The current predicament of socialism is in great part linked to the obsession with 'correct consciousness'; the assumption of homogeneity; economic reductionism; the conflation of philosophy with history and sociology and of 'interest' with an imagined *telos*. The working class is crucial to capitalism; but the transition from this fact to the 'universal class' is not warranted, theoretically or on historical evidence. Neither the landed aristocracy (Leo Strauss); nor the enlightened bureaucracy (Hegel); nor the proletariat (Marx) may be singled out in this fashion - the quest for a bastion of wisdom is flawed. Nor was this claim ever warranted by Leninist claims to epistemological authority. Millions of soldiers, peasants, and members of the middle classes also fought for democracy.

The Russian term *intelligent* was not coterminous with the European intelligentsia, but

a truly déclassé intellectual proletariat, homeless and unprotected, isolated from the ruling class by its radicalism, and from the peasantry by its education. Both chasms were unbridgeable. Estranged and disaffected, it came to inhabit a world of its own, a peculiar world of internal emigration, a State within a State... the only home it could claim as its own... was its mental vision of the ideal society of the future. (Tibor Szamuely, Chapter 10).

Thus, the *intelligent* was marked by unrelenting opposition to autocracy, and belief in the primacy of ideology. This indicates that the very notion of *the* correct consciousness is fraught with philosophical problems. There were indeed numbers of workers who were in empathy with Bolshevism, but many of them changed their minds in the period 1918-1923. The same could be said for many communist intellectuals, not to mention the peasantry, which launched as many as eighty uprisings against the regime which they had originally welcomed. Why did this happen? And what explains the numerous instances of workers in empathy with authoritarian ideologies? (Refer Ernst Fraenkel's observation on *Gemeinschaft* in A 1). Complex issues should not be simplified and reduced to dogma.

D. 6/ Our wish to take leave of the present is enabled by ideology, the newest manifestation of the unhappy consciousness; whose promise is the latest version of Nietzsche's 'beyond'. 'Loathing for the present takes refuge in the spirit of the past and prophesy of what is to come' (Karl Lowith, 204).

### **E/ Retrieving the Present:**

The following issues require urgent consideration by socialists:

E. 1/ The idea that capitalism is a divine order beyond human knowledge and agency is central to 'mainstream' opinion. Smith brought in Providence, but could not postulate eternal recurrence - his was a primitive theology of economics (Robert Urquhart). Stanley Jevons' connection of [sunspots to business cycles](#) was a primitive theology. And there are updated versions of economic theology that need to be overcome.

There is no monolithic 'spirit of the age;' if there were, we would all be submerged and there would be no possibility of any transhistorical view of it. Neither the Enlightenment nor modernity are monoliths in this sense

E. 2/ Neo classical economics has abolished history. But its ideological accompaniment in the political sphere requires the *rectification* of history. One the one hand we are frozen in an eternal vista of capital accumulation (endless deferral); on the other we are recalling

past glory and striving to regain it (endless nostalgia; *algia* = longing; *nostos* = return). Marx provided a theology of economics; but wove into it an ideological element, the prediction of capitalist implosion led by the self-abolishing proletariat.

E. 3/ The principle of domination should not be inextricably linked to economic production; nor deduced from the presumed iron laws of necessity. This was recognized by Marx in 1844: “man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need ... hence man also produces in accordance with the laws of beauty” (EPM). Robert Urquhart argues:

The problem for both Marx and Bakunin is that the economic continues to be determining of individuality: but the economic is necessarily grounded in domination, enforced by the primary claim of economic theology that its workings are beyond human knowledge and agency - for even Marx and Bakunin see the imperatives of economic order as unanswerable. Liberation cannot come from the economy, nor from its transformation into a new kind of economic order that merely brings forth another form of domination and repetition. What is to be done? Clearly, neither bourgeois liberals and conservatives, committed as they are to economic domination; nor reactionaries such as Schmitt, who seek to escape from the economic through the absoluteness of sovereignty, have any answer.

In a sense, though, the answer is simple. Politics must not wither away, it must be recovered and, for the first time, truly realized. Freedom and equality are political, not economic, concepts. But this... brings forth the question: why on earth would anyone think that politics can be an escape from domination? The first part of an answer to this is entirely negative: if the domination invoked by economic theology is to be overcome, then it can only be overcome by the political - escape can only be rejection of theology and return to the worldly. But, then, is there any reason to think escape possible? A first step is to distinguish between the state and the political. The state is... understood to be, for good or ill, an instrument of domination. Marx, Bakunin, Bodin, Montchretien, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Schmitt, and Hayek... hold this view.

But if the state is always domination, then the polis is a very odd state. The state relation is command and obedience between ruler and ruled. But in the polis citizens rule themselves together for the purpose of freedom: domination is explicitly rejected and relegated to the household. Domination remains necessary, but it is precisely not a political relation. So there is an important, though very tricky, distinction between politics and the state, on the understanding that we accept the definition of the state as an instrument of domination (and independently of whether we think that is a good or a bad thing).

For the goal of the state so defined is to maintain order through a structure of command and obedience, while the goal of politics (the goal of the polis) is to realize the freedom and equality of citizens, and it is a goal that the citizens, together, must realize for themselves in speech and action (Robert Urquhart, 2016).

E. 3/ We live in a period of ideological implosion of state ideologies, i.e., the process whereby prevailing doctrines of epistemological or political hegemony fail to maintain the minimal coherence required for self-perpetuation, and are replaced by lies, deceit, and terror. This is accompanied by the visible collapse of the political institutions associated with these doctrines. In a word, political sophistry reveals itself as hollow rhetoric. That is reason enough for greater efforts to understand *ideology*.

In the age of autotelic capital, ideological implosion has gathered speed. This implies that the structure of power needs to actively undermine its own ideological underpinnings, when the pretence of representing the whole people is openly discarded; and the state appears as faction. Put differently, this phenomenon could be seen as an essentially 'negative and destructive feature of modern radicalism,' that can 'never be satisfied with any finite solution and therefore necessarily rejects every goal that it itself establishes... why, in other words, modern radical thought... necessarily worships a dark god of negation.' (Michael Gillespie, 1996; xxiii). Ideology is self-cancelling.

Humans are the unfinished animal, and it is our fate to remain unfinished. But the implosion of ideologies signifies the stuttering return of presence to the present, a reminder that soap bubbles vanish sooner or later, into thin air. In the absence of striving toward wisdom however, the Unchangeable reasserts itself, and ideological kitsch ('Don't worry, be happy') gets reformulated in a spiral of vacuous garrulity. In Andrew Shanks' words, the work of the unhappy consciousness '*is a ritual flight from reality. It is a ritual submission to the prescribed world-view of an authoritarian order, regardless of one's own experience of the truth.*' (Andrew Shanks, p 188).

E. 4/ Totalitarian politics subverts justice by ideological means; and transforms religious belief into ideological weaponry. The entire world population is confronted by a tyrannical assault on liberty - in part enabled by segments of the working classes.

E. 5/ Depending on the parameters employed, the number of unnatural deaths in the last century was between 175 to 250 million. This is historically unprecedented. But the relentless warfare has remained unexamined in the socialist tradition: at best what takes place are tactical debates. We need to subject violence to serious theoretical inquiry.

I will conclude with this sentence uttered by a character in a historical film about Munich in 1938: *We don't choose the times we live in; the only choice we have is how we respond.*

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